

# Life in the Sky

BY ROBIN JOHNSON

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Michael Life is a third generation pilot, and the only pilot in his family still living. Life's father and grandfather both flew small fixed wing aircraft, in addition to regular work, as a hobby.

"My grandfather would probably roll over in his grave if he knew I was a helicopter pilot," Life said. "but he's probably envious, too, because I'm doing what he always wanted to do."

Michael Life makes his living in the sky.

The K-MAX heavy duty helicopter is his constant companion when he is on duty. He goes where it goes for 12 - 14 days at a time. When not on duty, Life lives in Oregon.

Life's employer is based in Orem, Utah and owns the K-MAX helicopter Life shares with a fellow employee, who also stays with the machine for 12 to 14 day shifts. Summer work brings 12 day fire shifts while winter work changes to 14 day logging shifts.

Getting water where it is needed most is Life's main job on the Cascade II fire. The K-MAX helicopter carries a bucket that holds 660 gallons of water. A large orange vat sits at the highest point on the road west of Soldier Hollow. Fire workers call it "the pumpkin." It holds 6,000 gallons of water.

Life and his helicopter can make a round trip run from the vat to the fire and back to the vat again in as little as two and a half minutes, losing less than ten gallons to leakage over the top of the bucket.

Life and his support crew are assigned to the Alpha Division, one of five divisions currently fighting the fire. The front line of the Alpha Division is to the northwest of Cascade Springs.



Orem helicopter mechanic Cory Pond is pictured here with pilot Michael Life.

Flying for two hours and grounded for one gets Life through his day. His support crew does everything but fly the helicopter.

"We wash the chopper, do all the maintenance, fuel the chopper and make sure the pilot is happy and has his lunch," crew support member Cory Pond said. "There are three men on the chopper's support crew."

Fuel capacity is measured in pounds. The K-MAX can hold 1450 pounds, equal to 229 gallons of fuel. Life said he refuels to a little below capacity at 1200 pounds.

Two years of fixed wing pilot training and the licenses from that, and another eight months of helicopter training prepared Life for earning his wages in the sky. Commitment to helicopter training is also a commitment to firefighting and logging work. Life has also worked in seismic and oil exploration. With twelve years piloting experience behind him, Life said this is his fourth year working on fires.

Dangers fire pilots encounter are other air crafts, wind shifts, heavy smoke and severe haze. Even with these dangers, Life said logging is still the biggest danger helicopter pilots face.

Whenever Life takes to the sky, somewhere there are two previous generation "fixed wing" pilots, pleased with the family "helicopter" pilot. Michael Life is living out three generations of dreams by devoting his life to the sky.

## Soldier Hollow Is Fire Command Center

10-1-03

**SOLDIER HOLLOW** - The Olympic facility of Soldier Hollow has served as the command post for fire-fighting efforts to control the Cascade Springs burn. The blaze in the Uinta National Forest has come within two miles of Soldier Hollow.

Soldier Hollow has become a temporary village with about 320 firefighters headquartered at the Olympic cross-country skiing and biathlon venue. There are tents for overnight accommodations and trailers with shower units and food service. "We have made everything available to them, providing telecommu-

nations, restrooms and meeting space," said Howard Peterson, general manager of Soldier Hollow. "It's kind of a mini-Olympics with all the various departments."

The Soldier Hollow charter school was closed and chuck wagon dinner and horseback trail rides were cancelled when the fire broke out and helicopters were staging from the site. But programming has resumed on a limited scale with a biathlon competition and wedding ceremony occurring last weekend. Peterson said he was looking at events in a three-week period for possible adjustment.

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and group.

Nola Boren was resilient and talented. She was multi-faceted. Those who came to know her well were continually amazed by her abilities, her passions, her devotions and her determination. Of her it would truly be said, "She always tried to do good, simply for good's sake."

When one grows as old as she was, the passing is always bitter sweet, for the loss leaves a huge hole in the heart of those who loved and cherished such a per-

broad daylight all night long. one is listening.

Now the school district lighting the beautifully renovated North School all night with dozen spotlights plus one on flag. The light on the flag is necessary, but only 3 or 4 lights the building would be sufficient. Don't they realize they are wasting the taxpayers money on excessive lighting? There are unemployed people in this valley paying school taxes on their homes. There are many old

## OCTOBER IS NATIONAL CANCER AWARENESS

### A FAMILIAR FACE, AN UNKNOWN FIGHT

Breast cancer know no bounds; it effects everyone — patient, family, and friends. Early detection is by far the best weapon in fighting a disease that nationally will effect 211,300 women and their families this year. Locally, an estimated 1,100 Utah women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, and nearly 200 of those will die.

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness month. Take a moment and think of your mother, wife, sister, or girlfriend. This disease is life-altering, not only for her but for all those around her. Most women diagnosed with breast cancer have no history of it in their family. Make an educated choice and talk with your health care provider about the tools that are in place for early detection. Exercise and healthy eating also play a role. Make a wise choice — one that will give you the information you need, or prepare you for what may come.



EARLY DETECTION SAVES LIVES

Stop by our office

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